

COMUNICAÇÃO APRESENTADA NO

Annual Meeting - American Educational Research Association (AERA) - *Validity and Value in Education Research* - New Orleans, Louisiana April 1-5, 2002 participação em Symposium com investigadores do Reino Unido (coordenador), Islândia, Irlanda e Noruega, intitulado: *A forum for addressing issues of participative democracy, identity and multiculturalism through citizenship education in Europe: Implications and international dimensions*. A minha comunicação intitulou-se *Acceptance of Differences through the Study of the Past: An Action Research Report*.

ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCES THROUGH THE STUDY OF THE PAST AND DIVERSE SOCIETIES: AN ACTION RESEARCH REPORT

1. The concept of multicultural education supporting this study

“Multicultural education is a field of study and an emerging discipline whose major aim is to create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups”. (Banks & Banks, 1995, p. XI)

The definition of *multicultural education* presented by Banks and Banks (1995) at the very beginning of the remarkable publication in the field, the *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education*, is one that I assume because it contains the main ideas I think multicultural education would contain and is useful for my classes and for developing my research on multicultural education.

I am teaching courses for kindergarten and elementary teachers, and my students are from the same race and ethnic group, but they are neither from the same social class nor the same cultural group. And, most of all, they would teach usually students from very different social classes and social groups and seldom from different race or ethnics groups. I also truly agree with the same Authors, who consider is an important goal, that is,

to help all students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function effectively in a pluralistic democratic society and to interact, negotiate, and communicate with peoples from diverse groups in order to create a civic and moral community that works for the common good. (Banks & Banks, 1995, p. XI)

It is having in mind this goal of multicultural education I use to integrate multicultural education in my classes. This is also an important goal of citizenship education according to my concept of citizenship education. This connection between citizenship and multiculturalism was already presented by Banks (1990). From my point of view multicultural education and citizenship education would work together in schools. Parker considers that “uniting them in a single framework is arguably the most important issue in US education as the 21st arrives” (1998, p. 71). Sometimes I use to stress the need for

multicultural education starting from the eight characteristics of successful multidimensional citizenship during the first part of the 21st century specifically “the ability to understand, accept, appreciate and tolerate cultural differences” (Kubow, Grossman & Ninomiya, 1998, p. 116). In most European countries we do not have the same *obstacles* referred by Parker (1998). Furthermore findings from CICE Thematic Network Project 1998-2001 stress that now “we will have civic and social relationships that are rather different from the older, simpler loyalties of nation, class and family. Tolerance of differences and empathy, recognition of underlying similarities and solidarity will become key elements of social life” (Ross, 2001, p. 12).

It is not the place to discuss the concept of citizenship education, but I would refer that I agree with the goal for multicultural education referred above because it would seem to point to a communitarian perspective of citizenship education, but it also stresses a *pluralistic democratic society*. Nieto’s (1992, p. 208) definition of multicultural education yet helps to explain better my approaches to multicultural education:

[A] process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers represent. Multicultural education permeates the curriculum and instructional strategies used in schools, as well as the interactions among teachers, students and parents, and the very way that schools conceptualise the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the principles of social justice. (Quoted from Gay, 1995, p. 29).

2. Implementing Multicultural Education

Nieto’s definition suggests how multicultural education would be developed. I do not follow a single model in my courses, for example the principles of the *Model for Global and Multicultural Perspective* (Bennet, 1990) would be found among the goals of my courses. It would be possible to present several examples. Banks’s influences in my teaching are countless, not only from the field of multicultural education, but also from the field of social studies in general. But I would stress that most of the principles underlining their three models of multicultural education (1991) are also presented in my teaching and mainly the ideal of reaching a transformative curriculum because I value the constructivist learning and he points out that a “constructivist approach to teaching and learning is a key component of the transformative, multicultural curriculum” (1999, p. 61). In consonance to a CICE Project recommendation I am trying, in the training of social educators, systematically promote “a wider dialogue between practitioners in higher education and the various school systems about the meaning, purposes and practices of citizenship education and the development of social understanding” (Ross, 2001, p. 12).

Therefore these ideas are always present in the planning and implementation of every course I teach in courses of initial and in-service teacher education.

3. The Projects

3.1 The context of these Projects

Elementary teacher education was a bachelor's degree until 1996. Then, it started to be a licence degree, a Portuguese degree similar to the US masters degrees (between 4 - 6 years). Higher Education institutions organized a two years course supported by the Ministry of Education to give opportunity to actual teachers get the new degree.

At the same time it was a form to promote a systematic in-service actualisation. Classes run four times a week, 5 to 8 p.m. This post-graduation course had a set of subjects in common and a specialization on four main areas of the elementary curriculum. One of them was Environmental Studies, which includes social studies education and science education. Social studies education offered a course on geography education, other on History. Both courses integrated an anthropological perspective and tried to draw relationships between history and geography. I taught the history course named *Place and Every Day Life Through the Times* in the first semester of the second year and the workshop on *Teaching Social Studies* in the second semester.

It is also required to develop a written Project dealing with a fieldwork research. At the middle of the first semester the students-teachers had the opportunity to choose the topic of their final projects among several topics presented by the researcher¹. Lucile, Olivia and Samantha chose since the beginning multicultural education. Cathie selected every day life during the time of the Portuguese Discoveries, but she changed after six weeks.

In general terms the research methodology followed is mainly based on Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) orientations for action research. The researcher could not observe any lessons and it was not possible to videotape them, but students reported weekly to the researcher based on their diaries. The researcher also wrote a diary based on these reports and on the reflections during the meetings. Several times the students-teachers stressed how unhappy they were because they could not tape student's participation. The research process followed by each one was different. At the beginning my principal concern was to help them to understand, to accept that they should not start the intervention in classes or collecting materials without analysing the concept of citizenship and

¹ These studies were part of a broad investigation project *Teaching/learning social studies in the yearly years*, the main project, with several dimensions, including action research, carried out, since 1996, by the social studies educators members of the Child Studies Centre – Institute of Child Studies – University of Minho – Portugal.

multicultural education discussed by specialists in the field to help them to analyse and clarify their own conceptions of citizenship and multicultural education. They read some selected texts and discussed them, but they were impatient, and they thought they would start to plan the intervention. Then, we started to have weekly individual meetings to discuss the plans for the intervention in their classrooms and trying to integrate the new contents of the courses. We also discussed the integration of new methodologies I used in my teaching and they were using to plan units in the *Workshop on Teaching Social Studies*² they were attending during the second semester.

Cathie's Project

Cathie was very upset because she liked very much history even if before this post-graduation course she only knew a kind of factual, political history, a history of big men, and a Europocentric history. She started to look with more enchantment to every day life history, to every person history to a history constructed from several perspectives. Now she looked to most of the books and other materials available and she could not find enough support for the teaching of the new kind of history she would like to prepare materials for fostering the respect, the understanding of cultural differences. Worse, she felt that some of her concepts changed and some ideas she found in book she liked before now did not make sense to her. She was truly upset, saying that it was very difficult for her to carry out the project.

Meanwhile she perceived that she was looking in a more empathetic way, with other eyes, to one of her students, Hugo, an African student that was showing less integration in class, or, as one day she told in a meeting: "The problems would be the same but I am looking to them differently". She noticed that she did not know almost anything about this student's life. Smoothly she started to talk a little with her mother when she went to pick him in school.

Cathie was thinking to approach the concept of family putting in practice some of the new methodologies she learned. However she did not want to give out history. Then, Cathie took a decision she proposed me to change the focus of her project. She decided that she would concentrate it in an intervention in her class to integrate the African student. She decided to start with this student family history and to use oral history following Vidigal (1999). Students prepared an interview they did in classroom to Hugo's grandmother, who brought objects she kept from her country. On the other hand, Cathie decided to use an

² In this course they worked almost every time in small groups, trying to apply most of the principles of cooperative learning they had also analysing in group. They would select a main idea (Banks, 1991) to plan two units for students of two different years of elementary schools using one or two methodologies and a few strategies and construct the pedagogical materials.

example non-example model of teaching concept adapted from Jantz (1999). The examples and non-examples would be presented through pictures containing families and non-families from different times and places. Is not possible here to describe the variety of strategies used, she integrated very well several strategies that would be included in Banks (1999) suggestions. Hugo became integrated and started to speak with their peers about many things he remembered from Angola, her country, showing them pictures he found by several ways. Students developed a deep interest for other cultures. One day Cathie reflected: "I am not noticing Hugo anymore, what does this means?" She concluded that he was in fact truly integrated. She started to appreciate not only the development of this student but also the development of other students, as she stressed in the conclusion of his work: "I saw students that usually were truly ashamed, if they were invited to participate, participating voluntarily. I feel that they grew up a lot during this intervention (...) In fact children learn by doing, as I already knew well, but it is not all, they learn interacting, thinking about what they did." (Cathie, 2001, p. 45).

Samantha's Project

Samantha had since the beginning one goal: to integrate a student, also a boy, John, that had behavioral problems and she was having problems with the other students, who did not accept him, and their parents were starting to complain. Since the beginning she titled the project as "Tolerance". She also said that she would like to integrate every day life history. However, the first plan she presented to me was a very traditional one, presenting a set of rules students would have to agree and follow, and after that a set of activities something disconnected. After a long meeting she presented a visual plan that I appreciated a lot. It connected individual and cultural differences in time (in three periods: long, long time ago – long time ago – and in grand-parents time) related to food, clothing and transportation. She pretended to relate it to differences among students, specifically behavioral differences. She selected very good materials and started to analyse pictures related with food having students in a big group. She was astonished with students' observations. She wrote: "The cultural differences were a surprise, coming from the elements of several pictures. They showed also influences from the information learned by television" (Samantha, 2001, p. 26). The student's capacity to observe the pictures and to hypothesise and to relate knowledge was still more unexpected when they worked in small group. Then, several groups noticed that they had very different experiences, and knowledge, they learned from their families. One day one student said: "John is different". Several children argue: "We are all different". They were close to discuss what Samantha would like to discuss at the beginning, but they had now a much more open mind to understand the differences.

Olivia Project

Olivia was one of the oldest students – teachers. It was supposed to develop some kind of fieldwork, but she tried to do only a literature review, or even her comments about multicultural education. She maintained in her final project title this initial idea, she titled it only: *Multicultural Education*. We discussed a lot, she planned units based on the Portuguese regions stereotypes, something similar that would be included in *The Contributions Approach* to curriculum (Banks, 1995, 1999). After long reflections she developed a set of four small units looking to the community from a different perspective, but mainly she used much more active and democratic methodologies in her classroom. At the end she reflected: “It is not necessary to have children from different races or ethnies, to be necessary that the educational action would be based on pluralism and diversity. (...) The education for pluralism is not only a barrier against violence, but also an active principle for cultural and civic enrichment in our contemporary societies. It is not necessary to have ‘different children’ in our classroom to plan our lessons in a multicultural perspective. Then, I tried to develop in my students their own cultural identity but at the same time showing how much their culture received from other cultures” (Olivia, 2001, p. 30).

Lucile Project

This teacher works in a school close to a big gipsy settlement. The school proposed a project to the Ministry of Education: the gypsies were integrated in classrooms, but they were having support in the morning or in the afternoon according to their schedule of classes. She was the supporting teacher. She thought that had done a good work, mainly in collaboration with a social worker and she proposed to tell her experience. We spoke a lot and I found that she had several biases against gypsies; she reproduced several stereotypes mainly when we were trying to plan some intervention focusing on the eight gyps that attended this school. I was thinking how to approach these issues when I asked her: “Why do you have only boys in your school? In fact they have girls and boys but she always refer to them as my “little boys” (in Portuguese *meninos*). She also always referred to the good relationships she had with their “fathers”, but this was correct. In fact, only fathers, that is, only men, went to school to speak with the teachers or administrators. She reflected on this, and also detected some of the stereotypes she had. When she told me her experience I called her attention about facts she was referring to, based on some media that were not correct. Therefore, she decided to know better their students. She read a lot about gypsy’s history and culture. She read the scientific literature about gypsies in Portugal. Then, she

prepared an interview to the mother of her “children” as she started to refer to them instead of my “meninos”. The explicit objective of this interview was trying to understand why gipsy children do continued to have some problems in school when everyone was trying to help them? How can teachers and administrators help them to have success in school, to like school? However, Lucile also tried to know better the way their children lived, their culture. She was truly happy when she described to me the context of the interviews in the settlement. She also interviewed the social worker and the teacher that had students in their classes. At the end she summed up her experience in these words: “Now I am ready to start, and at the beginning I thought I was ready to finish”.

Some final considerations

These projects were the first research these teachers developed. In spite of their exploratory characteristics they can be classified, following Bennett (2001), conceptual framework on multicultural research studies. The three case studies that included classroom intervention would be included in the *Cluster One: Curriculum Reform*. They had some incursions in almost the three genres included in this cluster. However, they also have some common points with other genres included in other clusters. For example Cathie Project stresses the ethnic identity development as well as prejudice reduction. Olivia and Samantha Projects have connections with the genre ethnic groups cultures, the other genre of cluster three: multicultural competence. Lucile project would be clearly included in *Cluster Two: Equity Pedagogy*, and it fits better in the *Genre 4: School and Classroom Climates*.

In January all these teachers, but Lucille, were interviewed by me for another study I am doing, and I included two questions that motivated a reflection about their work. They were asked to say how would the study of history contribute to develop respect for cultural differences; and how they would explore two pictures to foster respect for cultural differences.

Their reflections were as one could suppose. Probably the new methodologies used by Olivia will remain in their children memories, as a good time they had in school as they sad me when I visited the school. She did notice several aspects, but in general she referred to many times that the pictures would be used to develop respect for differences, tolerance. Samantha and Cathie showed that they are much more able to develop a multicultural history curriculum that the other teachers, even those who also did the post-graduation course. What was impressive was that they never forgot the goal, that is, to use the pictures to develop the understanding of cultural differences. Other teachers interviewed depicted even more interesting aspects that could be explored, but the goal for foster respect for

multicultural was secondary. This shows, as many research studies had shown, how important are the concrete practice in schools.

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